

August 28, 2009

SUBJECT: Performance Guidance for Rating Cycle Ending September 30, 2009

TO: All CSREES Employees

FROM: Colien Hefferan
Administrator

This memorandum describes the procedures to be used for finalizing performance appraisals and awards for the October 1, 2008 – September 30, 2009 performance cycle.

- Each employee will be rated by their immediate supervisor (rating official). Each rating official will finalize the rating with the reviewing official's approval (typically the second level supervisor). Each Deputy Administrator and OA Director will meet with the Associate Administrator to review their unit's rating. A summary of ratings from each unit will be compiled and reviewed by the Associate Administrator. Once the unit's meeting with the Associate Administrator occurs, the rating officials will then hold formal performance discussions with employees. The purpose of Associate Administrator review of summary ratings is to ensure that each employee receives a rating to compare/evaluate against the achievement of overall Agency goals, identify trends, and resolve any apparent issues.
- Each employee will be required to prepare a 1-2 page accomplishment report. Additional pages will not be considered. **The deadline for employee submission of accomplishment reports is determined by supervisors but will be no later than October 9, 2009.** The report should be formatted by performance element and focus on the specific accomplishment, as well as its impact on the process/work, client/customer, or unit/organization. Besides carefully reviewing their performance plans, employees may find it useful to refer back to previous accomplishment reports, activity or status reports, and/or calendars in preparing accomplishment reports. Accomplishment reports serve as a reminder to supervisors and employees of specific individual and/or group achievements, contributions, and accomplishments within a rating cycle. Supervisors will use personal observation of employee performance, written accomplishment reports, and/or feedback from various sources to determine an employee's rating of record.
- **HRD will provide training to new employees (and those who would like a refresher) on the preparation of accomplishment reports on October 1, 2009, at 9:30 a.m. in 1410 Waterfront.** If you plan to attend this session of Writing Accomplishment Report Training, please register in AgLearn. If you have problems registering, please contact Ashley Magill (301) 504-1476. There also is information on "Writing Accomplishment Report" available at <http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/hrd/performance/presentations.htm>
- The following levels of performance are defined to provide clarification. Supervisors should communicate these definitions to their employees.

Fully Successful - Fully Successful performance is good performance. Work performed at this level is of good quality, the expected quantity, and is accomplished within the established deadlines or time frames.

Exceeds Fully Successful - Performance which consistently exceeds the performance standards established for the Fully Successful level.

- CSREES will continue to recognize *Fully Successful with at least 2 points in the Exceeds Column, Superior and Outstanding* performance. Employees who receive a Fully Successful rating of record with at least 2 points in the Exceeds Column will receive a performance award. Employees who receive a *Superior* rating of record may receive either a performance award or time off award of 24 hours. Employees who receive an *Outstanding* rating of record may receive either a performance award, QSI, or time off award of 40 hours. If considering time off, please refer to the policy guidance at <http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/hrd/awards/files/table-monetary-non-monetary.pdf>. Employees who have received a QSI within the past 52 weeks are ineligible to receive a QSI this rating cycle. Supervisors should contact their servicing specialist in HRD if they plan to give any QSIs. A separate justification, in addition to the employee's accomplishment report, is required for a QSI. Performance awards will be pro-rated for employees who have been employed with CSREES for less than one year.
- CSREES will continue the use of spot, extra effort, time off and non-monetary token awards to recognize efforts during the rating cycle.
- Supervisors should encourage and recognize team and group efforts.
- Performance management policy document, P&P 435.1 - CSREES Performance Planning and Appraisal, can be found on <http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/ppweb/PDF/435-1.pdf> for reference purposes.

Completion of Performance Appraisals (AD-435P)

Performance Appraisals (AD-435P) will be completed using the electronic version of the form, available on e-Forms. Units may make the necessary changes to employee AD-435P forms that were saved on disk last year. Each Deputy Administrator will receive an employee list from HRD that will provide the employee information necessary to update/complete the upper section of each AD-435P. Once the form is completed and printed, each individual AD-435P should, again, be saved to disk and retained for use for future performance cycles. Since the disk will contain sensitive information, please keep the disk in a secure place and/or password protect the documents on disk or in your system, when saving.

Employees who have been under performance elements and standards (PE/S) for at least 90 days must receive an appraisal using the AD-435P. Those excluded include student assistant appointees, employees in full-time training, employees who are on intermittent work schedules, and employees on temporary appointments limited to one year or less. Performance cycles for employees who have not been covered under PE/S for the 90 day minimum appraisal period are normally extended. The information below describes how extension of performance cycles will be handled. The reason for this policy is so that employees in these situations who are eligible for performance awards get included in the annual agency allocation for performance awards. Please call HRD if there are other situations which require policy determinations.

- 1) Employees new to CSREES who will not be covered under PE/S by the end of the performance cycle (September 30, 2009) will have their cycle extended if they meet

the 90 days and can be rated by October 19, 2009. If an employee cannot be rated by October 19, 2009, the employee will receive their first rating of record at the end of the next performance cycle (September 30, 2010). Since the performance cycle for employees in this situation is longer, supervisors should consider scheduling an additional progress review to provide the employee with important performance feedback.

- 2) Employees who were put on new PE/S later in the performance cycle due to promotion or reassignment and who will not be covered under those PE/S by the end of the performance cycle (September 30, 2009), will have their cycle extended if they meet the 90 days and can be rated by October 19, 2009. If an employee cannot be rated by October 19, 2009, the employee will be rated based on their performance in the previous position.

NOTE: Employees who have retired or separated and were covered under a certified performance plan for at least 90 days in the rating cycle should be appraised and receive a performance award if their rating warrants. Employees must submit an accomplishment report, preferably before their departure.

In order to effectively assist an employee receiving a *Less Than Fully Successful* summary rating, supervisors should contact their servicing Employee Relations Specialist immediately upon making that determination. A written justification providing the details concerning an employee's performance must accompany the AD-435P form to HRD if any one element is rated *Does Not Meet Fully Successful*.

Completion of Award Forms (AD-287-2)

A recommendation and Approval of Awards form (Form AD-287-2) must be prepared for each award nomination.

- All Cash awards and Time Off awards require a written justification. If you provide a written justification for the performance rating, you need not provide one for the award. HRD is requiring one justification for the performance rating/award package as indicated in "Documentation to HRD" below. An award justification may be a narrative description (achievement, role, and impact), or an employee's accomplishment report.
- A QSI may be recommended only for those employees who receive an Outstanding rating, and who have not received a QSI within the last 52 weeks. QSIs are given in the position and at the grade level for which performance was assessed. A copy of the accomplishment report provided for the "Outstanding" rating WILL NOT be sufficient documentation for those employees receiving a QSI. Supervisors will need to prepare a separate justification for a QSI following the guidance in Attachment A. QSIs to the 4th and 7th steps of a grade extend the employee's current within-grade waiting period by one year. For specific questions regarding QSIs, refer to your servicing Human Resources Specialist.
- It is important to recognize that QSIs are the very highest form of performance recognition and that a change in an employee's position and/or level of responsibility during the rating cycle should be considered in determining an appropriate award. Specifically, QSIs may be appropriate when the Outstanding rating assigned to the employee is based primarily on the employee's performance since the promotion/reassignment. This supports the intent of QSIs to recognize not only Outstanding performance, but the expectation that performance is expected to continue at a very high level. Thus, when an Outstanding rating is based primarily on

performance preceding a promotion/reassignment, an assessment should be made as to whether the employee has achieved a sufficiently high level of ***performance in the new position*** to warrant a QSI. If not, a performance-based cash award or time off award should be considered.

- The latest date a QSI will be made effective is December 6, 2009. Any QSIs received after this date will be changed to cash awards.
- A QSI will not be held for a Within Grade Increase (WGI) to be effective.

A citation must be provided in Block 11 of AD-287-2 for performance awards and QSIs. The following citation is recommended:

"This award is based upon an official performance appraisal rating of (*Fully Successful, Superior or Outstanding*) for the rating period October 1, 2008 through September 30, 2009."

Signatures are needed in blocks 20, 21 and/or 22.

Since performance awards, time off awards, and QSIs are based upon the annual performance rating, an employee may not be recommended for more than one award in this category. Recognizing specific accomplishments or achievements during this time period with other awards, such as extra effort or non-monetary, is permitted.

Documentation to HRD

Provided below is the chronological listing that each individual employee appraisal and award package is to be arranged. Completed packages should be bundled by location or office and forwarded to HRD as a group with the Employee Listing for the location/office atop the bundle.

- 1) Employee Listing
- 2) Original AD-287-2, if an award will be given;
- 3) Original AD-435P signed/dated by the Rating/Reviewing Officials and employee;
- 4) Cash & Time Off Awards: Employee's accomplishment report or written justification;
QSIs: A copy of the written justification used for the rating of record, see Attachment A;
- 5) A written justification for an Unacceptable Rating;
- 6) Original Performance Plan.

Individual employee appraisal and award packages should be bundled by location or office and forwarded to HRD as a group with the Employee Listing for the location/office on the top of the bundle.

NOTE: Supervisors must complete and document the Employee Listing in space provided indicating the date the appraisal was issued or a reason as to why it was not, i.e., employee's cycle was extended through (date) or employee reported (date) and will be rated next cycle, etc. Please do not send Individual Development Plans (IDPs), training forms, lists of publications, or other management documents to HRD in this package. These are not required documents in the Employee Performance File and will not be filed if received.

Please send employee listing and all employees' appraisal and award packages to the address below no later than December 4, 2009. Completed award packages in by this date will be made

effective December 6, 2009, and paid out in this calendar year. Packages received after December 4th or incomplete packages will be paid out in 2010.

Please send all performance appraisal/award packages to the following address:

Theresa Bailey
USDA/ARS/Human Resources Division
Performance and Awards Staff
5601 Sunnyside Avenue, Room 3-1282D
Beltsville, MD 20705-5107

Contact

Questions regarding performance appraisal and awards policy or procedures may be referred to Theresa Bailey on 301-504-1452. Rating officials should refer any performance problems which may result in a *Less Than Fully Successful* rating, to their servicing Employee Relations Specialist.

Other Information

Attachments B-D provide a summary of the important dates for completing the 2009 performance cycle, the award amounts for the 2009 cycle, and probable dates for the 2010 performance cycle.

To learn more about the performance management process, employees are encouraged to take the AgLearn course, “Performance Management at USDA – Achieving Results Together”. Even though the course is framed from a supervisor’s perspective, it will help all employees better understand the performance management process. This training is optional but it has been added to employees’ training plans.

Justification Outline

- 1. During the period of (give time of performance), (individual/group) did what?
Beginning paragraph should start with this sentence.**
- 2. This exceeded expected performance as identified in the current position description by:**
 - Improving quality
 - Timely completion of the project
 - Increasing productivity
 - Overcoming adverse obstacles or working under unusual circumstances
 - Using unusual creativity
 - Saving the Government time and/or money
 - Increasing program effectiveness
- 3. As a result:**
 - Project acceptance
 - Savings in time, money, and/or material
 - More efficiency
 - Effectiveness
 - Technological advancement
 - Productivity increase
 - Improved levels of cooperation
- 4. Therefore, we propose an award of (amount/hours) which has been calculated using the (Measurable Benefits/Non-measurable Benefits/Time-Off Scales.)**
 - If based on measurable benefits, enter the expected Benefit to the organization.
 - If based on non-measurable benefits, enter the Value of Benefits and the Application.

Attachment B

2009 Performance Appraisal Cycle

September 2009	Administrator issues annual letter on Performance Appraisal Cycle
September 30, 2009	2009 Performance Appraisal Cycle ends
October 1, 2009	HRD training on preparation of accomplishment reports
October 9, 2009	Employee submission of accomplishment report is determined by the supervisor but will be no later than October 9, 2009
October 19, 2009	Extension date for meeting 90 day minimum appraisal period If an employee has not been under a performance plan for 90 days by this date, they will not be rated until the 2010 rating cycle.
October 13 - October 23, 2009	Deputy Administrators/OA Directors meet with Associate Administrator to review summary of unit's ratings
October 26 – December 2, 2009	Supervisor meets with employees to discuss the rating after the approval by the Reviewing Official and review by the Associate Administrator
December 4, 2009	Unit's employee listing & all appraisal and award packages due to HRD
December 6, 2009	Effective date of performance awards if documentation received in HRD by 12/4/09
December 31, 2009	Performance awards will be in this pay check if documentation received in HRD by 12/4/09

Attachment C

Summary of 2009 Performance Awards

\$550	Fully Successful rating with at least 2 points in the Exceeds Column
\$750 or 24 hours	Superior rating of 5/3, 6/4 or 7/3
\$1,000 or 24 hours	Superior rating of 6/2 or 8/2
\$1,300 or 24 hours	Superior rating of 7/1 or 9/1
QSI or cash (see below) or 40 hours	Outstanding rating of 8/0 or 10/0 (3.3% increase above the step 1 of the grade or a minimum of \$1,500)

2009 Performance Award Cash Amounts for **Outstanding** Rating

Rating/ Grade	Cash Award in 2009
Outstanding 15	4,028
Outstanding 14	3,424
Outstanding 13	2,898
Outstanding 12	2,437
Outstanding 11	2,032
Outstanding 10	1,850
Outstanding 9	1,681
Outstanding 8	1,522
Outstanding 1-7	1,500

REMINDERS:

Employees who have been here the entire 12 month cycle and are receiving Outstanding ratings should be given the option of receiving the Cash Award, Time Off Award, or QSI if they did not receive a QSI in the last 12 months.

Amounts are to be pro-rated for employees who have been employed with CSREES for less than the 12 month cycle and they cannot receive a QSI or Time Off Award.

2010 Performance Appraisal Cycle

October 1, 2009	Start of 2010 performance cycle
November 6, 2009	Performance plans should be provided to employees at the beginning of each appraisal period (normally within 30 days) per 5 CFR 430.206
February 5, 2010	Supervisors certify to HRD that 2010 performance plans have been put in place for all ratable employees
March-May 2010	Mid-year performance reviews
September 30, 2010	End of performance cycle – for all USDA agencies